

HUB Mall incident response appropriate: Reports

(Edmonton) In a pair of reports looking into the actions of University of Alberta officials in responding to the June 15 HUB Mall incident that left three security-company employees dead and one seriously wounded, the university's Risk Management Services office has determined that the situation was handled appropriately and in a timely manner.

"Bearing in mind that emergency response to violent crime such as this is the responsibility of the City Police, who did their job very well, we believe our emergency response processes and actions functioned effectively in this situation," said Philip Stack, associate vice-president of Risk Management Services and chief author of the reports. "No members of our community were injured; we worked effectively with emergency responders; we communicated with all of our many stakeholder groups; and the university was able to return to its normal work very quickly."

During the incident, the university's Crisis Management Team (CMT) was required to support first responders, displaced university residents, members of the university community and university events affected by the incident. While the incident highlighted the strength of the CMT and the benefits of routine exercises and drills, said Stack, it also revealed areas for improvement relating to staffing and the speed with which an incident can overwhelm first-responder resources.

With a desire to continually improve the response to emergency situations and to address concerns about the HUB Mall incident, the U of A commissioned a pair of reports looking into the CMT's actions in response to the incident. The first report, a standard debrief produced after activation of the CMT and the Emergency Operations Centre, looked at what was done well and areas that can be improved upon.

The second report looked more closely at how administrators communicated events to the university community, specifically focusing on questions asked by some members of the university community as to why the university notification system was not used.

In this case, the report supported the decision not to implement the university notification system, citing the information that was available immediately following the incident and the nature of the incident itself.

"There were some very real and legitimate worries and anxiety people expressed to us concerning the decisions made with regard to the communication of the June 15 incident to the university community," said Stack. "Based on the facts associated with the incident and our current policies on the use of the system, we have determined that the university acted clearly within defined policies and procedures.

"That being said, we are listening to those who raised concerns and will continue to review our emergency protocols and take a closer look at the issues surrounding the deployment of the emergency notification system with less than perfect information."

The two reports identified 19 recommendations for administrators to review. The recommendations can be found at the [Office of Emergency Management](#) website.

"As in all events of this kind, we have reviewed every piece of information we can about the event in order to identify improvements. Several recommendations have been identified; we will be acting on many of them," said Stack. "We have already corrected certain elements of our systems, including a glitch in our mass email capabilities and in processes to reach senior U of A Protective Services officials during off hours.

"We will learn from the whole experience and will be better prepared in future."

A third-party report is underway on how the university responded to the incident, with a significant focus on communications and interaction with the Edmonton Police Service. The report was commissioned to ensure that the university's emergency response policies and procedures reflect best practices, said Stack. Details are expected before the end of the year.



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
RISK MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Emergency Response Recommendations from the June, 2012 HUB Mall incident

Prepared by Risk Management Services
Approved September 27, 2012

Introduction

While the events of June 15th at HUB Mall were managed by the Edmonton Police Service, the University of Alberta's Crisis Management Team (CMT) was required to provide support to first responders, displaced University residents, impacted members of the University community and University events affected by the incident. The CMT also initiated and maintained communications with numerous external and community stakeholders. While the event highlighted the strength of the CMT, and the benefits of routine exercises and drills, the incident also identified areas for improvement relating to staffing and the speed with which an incident can overwhelm first responder resources.

University staff and students were generally supportive of the University's handling of this incident but did express concern about the amount and speed of information shared by the institution.

As the normal course following the activation of its Crisis management Team, a full debrief was undertaken focusing on an assessment of the operations and processes associated with the emergency response. The review and subsequent report produced eight recommendations for enhancements to the CMT.

In light of the concerns regarding the communications associated with the incident, a second review was undertaken. The review of the communications process produced a further 11 recommendations.

The recommendations from both reports are combined, in no particular order, in this document.

List of recommendations following the HUB Mall Incident

Recommendation 1

That Protective Services implement processes that will enable them to increase dispatch staffing to handle the high volume of calls without removing Peace Officers from the field.

Commentary: In the early stages of the HUB incident University of Alberta Protective Services (UAPS) members in the dispatch area were overwhelmed with calls and requests for information. This limited their ability to provide support for UAPS officers in the field.

Status: UAPS is evaluating.

Recommendation 2

That the Office of Emergency Management review and enhance the structure and processes to ensure that all CMT databases are current and that training of CMT members address the process and protocol for attending the EOC.

Commentary: During the HUB incident it was discovered that some Crisis Management Team members' contact information was inaccurate. As well, some CMT members were not certain about whether their attendance at the Emergency Operations Centre was required, even after the emergency message was issued.

Status: Office of Emergency Management has initiated.

Recommendation 3

That the Office of Emergency Management determine whether a system can be implemented whereby the activation message could be retrieved remotely by CMT members. Note, any such system must not add resource requirements to front-line members of Protective Services.

Commentary: During the HUB incident the emergency message went out to members of the Crisis Management Team at 1:40 a.m. but the information was not repeated. Members would like to be able to access the message to confirm details.

Status: Office of Emergency Management has begun evaluation.

Recommendation 4

The University's Interfaith Chaplains Association should be formally identified as a key resource within the University's CMT structure, a database containing contact information should be established and maintained, and Chaplains should receive training on the operation and functioning of the University's CMT and EOC.

Commentary: University chaplains played an important role in the response to the HUB incident. Formalizing the role of the chaplain association will recognize the value of their contribution while ensuring their continuing and enhanced presence for major emergencies.

Status: Office of Emergency Management has initiated.

Recommendation 5

Identify and train second and third individuals to fill the EOC coordinator position when the first position is unavailable.

Commentary: the EOC coordinator ensures the physical space used by University officials is made ready for CMT occupation whenever it is needed. The role is of sufficient importance that it is imperative an individual can be readily available at all times. (This was not a problem during the HUB incident as the first line EOC coordinator was available.)

Status: Office of Emergency Management has initiated.

Recommendation 6

Training for CMT members should be enhanced to include best-practice in documentation and the utilization of the tools that can assist them in the maintenance and coordination of log information.

Commentary: although record keeping is of vital importance during an emergency, pressing priorities sometimes interfere. This, in addition to a wide variety of tools, technologies and personal styles of users, added unnecessary complexity to record keeping during the HUB incident. This introduced the potential for failures in record keeping.

Status: Office of Emergency Management has initiated.

Recommendation 7

That the Office of Emergency Management review and enhance the structure and processes to ensure that all databases containing 24 hour emergency contact information of key internal and external stakeholders be maintained and kept current.

Commentary: In some cases CMT personnel had to leave phone messages for specific University stakeholders as off hours contact information was not available.

Status: Office of Emergency Management has initiated.

Recommendation 8

That the University enhance its monitoring of the public and media communications and the frequency of sharing that information with the Crisis Management Team. Furthermore that University Relations create a community response grid that enables the University where appropriate to support and validate information sharing during an incident. Finally, that the technology available within the EOC be improved allowing the CMT to monitor media as required.

Commentary: during an emergency it is important for the University to provide current and accurate information so it is not required to react to news media and social media reports that may be inaccurate, unverified or a threat to the University's reputation.

Status: University Relations and AICT are evaluating.

Recommendation 9

That Protective Services review and enhance its protocols for contacting senior off-duty Protective Services members.

Commentary: In the early minutes of the HUB incident the UAPS Duty Officer had difficulties contacting members of the UAPS management team due to problems getting through by cell phone during off hours. Although this had minimal impact on the outcome, it resulted in delays.

Status: New protocols have been developed.

Recommendation 10

That Protective Services establish an alternative protocol whereby an emergency notification could be sent without removing Protective Services resources from the field.

Commentary: The UAPS Duty Officer was one of a finite number of resources available in the field managing the scene and assisting Edmonton police during the HUB Mall incident. He would have had to leave the scene in order to compose and issue an emergency message, depleting resources where they were critically needed.

Status: UAPS is evaluating.

Recommendation 11

That Protective Services enhance its serious incident response training with the EPS and other emergency response agencies and address as part of the training the various emergency messaging systems the University has at its disposal.

Commentary: During the first minutes of the HUB incident EPS may have had information not available to UAPS. Improved sharing of information will help UAPS decision making, especially as it relates to the use of the emergency notification system.

In future incidents, EPS first responders may be able to provide input on the value of issuing a notification in particular instances, based on their knowledge of the emergency event.

Status: UAPS will initiate.

Recommendation 12

That Protective Services review its Active Shooter, Barricade Situation, and Hostage Situation Incident Response protocol to determine whether amendments could be made to further clarify in what circumstances an emergency message notification should be issued, with a possible view to lowering the minimum threshold required to issue a mass emergency communication.

Commentary: Some members of the University community complained that there should have been an emergency alert sent out to warn people in the area that shots had been fired and they should stay away for their own safety.

In a review of the decisions made during the minutes when such a notification could have been of value, RMS determined that the decision not to use the notification system was in keeping with current policy due to the fact that the exact nature of the event was not confirmed by UAPS.

RMS will review the policy and consider whether changes to the policy are required.

Status: RMS has begun to evaluate the related protocols.

Recommendation 13

That the Office of Emergency Management take further steps to inform the University community regarding its emergency communications systems, including its components and purpose.

Commentary: During the HUB incident some members of the University community had expectations about emergency communications that the University's system were not designed to meet. Specifically, some individuals believed the University should have issued an informational message to the community immediately.

The University's notification systems, however, are designed to send emergency messages only to warn people of an event and to provide information about what to do to protect themselves. They are not designed simply to provide information about an event that has occurred. See Recommendation 18 concerning the use of the University's home page.

Status: RMS and University Relations have initiated.

Recommendation 14

That Protective Services contact EPS to request a review of its communication protocols, particularly around the establishment of a unified command to determine if enhancements to those protocols should be made.

Commentary: During a significant emergency at the University, the protocol is for the trained Edmonton Fire or Police responders to take control of the scene when they arrive. In a "unified command" structure, Protective Services falls under the Fire or Police service and functions as part of a larger team. By more rapidly establishing the unified command, University officials will be able to get reliable information about the emergency in a more timely fashion.

Status: UAPS will initiate.

Recommendation 15

That the Office of Emergency Management establish a process to identify all potential internal key contacts during an emergency and maintain current contact information for these individuals and related groups.

Commentary: The HUB incident revealed gaps in key contact information for some individuals and groups.

Status: Office of Emergency Management has initiated.

Recommendation 16

That the Office of Emergency Management work with AICT to develop and verify a detailed protocol for the testing of the emergency notification system that includes a quality control element and will establish pass / fail criteria.

Commentary: The post-incident investigation of the emergency notification system revealed a problem with the method to deliver emails. The problem should have been noticed during testing of the systems but the assessment methodology did not identify any issues.

Status: Office of Emergency Management and AICT have initiated.

Recommendation 17

University Relations should continue to utilize social media as a means of communicating with the University community.

Commentary: Social media use has exploded in the few years since the University developed its notification protocols and, until relatively recently, was not considered reliable enough to be a primary communications vehicle. The HUB incident revealed the need to continue, and expand, the use of social media, especially Twitter, during an emergency.

Status: University Relations has initiated.

Recommendation 18

That the Office of Emergency management enhance its education to the University community regarding the University's home page being the primary source of information about an emergency event and that University Relations should review its processes to enable them to post information on the homepage in a timelier manner.

Commentary: University stakeholders, including some students and staff, complained that they did know what was going on as they received no official information from University administration in the early hours of the HUB incident. Many were unaware that the University's home page is updated during an emergency.

By educating the community and ensuring updates are placed on the home page as quickly as possible, there will be a single source of timely and reliable information available from the University without having to "push" messages from administration to 50,000 community members using multiple methods.

Status: RMS and University Relations have initiated.

Recommendation 19

That the Office of Emergency Management establish an inventory of email lists that could be utilized by the CMT during an emergency. Included in the inventory should be information about how to access the list.

Commentary: During the HUB incident, the University's emergency responders learned there are email lists available that they were unaware of, such as a list of students living in HUB as well as the other residences. Such lists could serve as a valuable link during emergencies that affect specific groups.

Status: Office of Emergency Management will initiate.